

American Opinion Summary

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1. Berlin
2. Cuba

1. BERLIN

Commentators see the "toughest" East-West confrontation yet shaping up over Berlin. This is the "unmistakable meaning" of such portents as Moscow's "aggressive" note of last week, coupled with mounting evidence of an "intense" military buildup in East Germany, a number conclude (e.g., Wash. Post, Providence Journal, Watertown Times, Jos. Alsop, Newsweek).

"Once more, it is plain, the Soviet Union is willing to go to the very edge of a third world war to gain Berlin," says the Washington Post. Sen. Aiken (R-Vt.) feels that if we do get involved in a "world catastrophe, it would be more likely to start in Berlin than any other part of the world."

There is considerable belief that the Soviet Union is planning a "test" of Western determination by using the East Germans to apply pressure on Berlin--particularly in the Western air corridors. If Khrushchev does this, "the allies will be faced with a situation that will test their nerves and diplomatic ingenuity to the limit," says Newsweek. Others agree that the West must "brace itself to turn back the most subtle and intensive pressures," in the coming weeks (Christian Science Monitor).

If any possibility remains of negotiating a solution of the crisis, "it must rest on our ability to convince Khrushchev that he cannot get us out of Berlin by means short of war," declares the Providence Journal.

But there is "grave danger that the Soviet leaders have convinced themselves that Western morale is not ready for another ordeal," warns the Washington Post. Given our "vacillating" policy in the past, the Wall St. Journal suggests that Khrushchev may well doubt the resolution of U.S. leaders to "stand their ground" in Berlin. Persuading him on this score may involve "more muscle-flexing" by the U.S., such as actually calling to active duty fresh elements of the ready reserve, adds the Journal's Philip Geyelin.

The Berlin and Cuba problems are "tightly interrelated," according to some. U.S. "indecision in one area can embolden Khrushchev to take greater risks in the other," says Business Week. Marguerite Higgins fears that "initial slowness" of the U.S. reaction in Cuba may have decided Khrushchev on a new era of

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"brinkmanship" in Berlin (also, David Lawrence).

2. CUBA

Reaction to the President's request for Congressional authority to call up Reservists finds observers continuing vigorously to debate the U.S. response to the Russian "build-up" in Cuba.

A number endorse this "precautionary move" (e.g., N.Y. Times, Wash. News). Although the incursion of Soviet strength into this hemisphere has aroused many "to demand sterner and sterner action," says the Philadelphia Inquirer, in a situation so "loaded with danger for the Free World" Mr. Kennedy "is fully justified in taking calm, deliberate and effective measures to meet it." The stand-by power he asks, the Inquirer adds, "should put the world on notice that we are not taking this Communist pushing-around lightly" (similarly, St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Watertown Times, Wash. Star).

Newsweek maintains that the Soviet Cuban build-up is "obviously not designed to support armed aggression against any other Latin nation," but is designed as "another carefully worked-out gambit in the cold war chess game whose chief current target is still Berlin." And, Newsweek adds, the Administration's response of "firm and cool control," including its "shrewdly timed and weighed" Reservist request, is "precisely the right antidote."

But others still demand "a forceful, decisive" U.S. course toward Cuba. To David Lawrence, the "trouble" with the Reservist idea is the implication that the U.S. "isn't really acting on principle, but is feeling its way expediently from one crisis to another." The Chicago Tribune protests that this not only adds no immediate strength to U.S. forces, but "enhances the appearance of vacillation and wavering" on Cuba. The President must be supported on this move, declares the Wall Street Journal, "because the nation cannot do otherwise"; but the action has the appearance of "improvisation" to answer political criticism of the Administration's "inaction." Some critics term it a "dramatic gesture" (e.g., N.Y. Herald Trib., Time magazine).

Some supporters of the President's "quiet resistance to demands for invasion" of Cuba are disturbed by the Reservist proposal. With the New York Post, the Providence Journal feels "the reason for the call-up is the more difficult to fathom because the President had just finished saying he did not foresee a necessity for military action but intended to continue our efforts to isolate the Castro regime politically and economically."